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ABSTRACT

Though the existence of a culturally pluralistic society has long been recognized in the United States, demographic trends will force new attitudes toward coping with a larger minority school population. Unless U.S. educators prepare to understand culturally pluralistic student bodies, the result will be an economy dependent on an under-educated or miseducated work force. The United States has a unique opportunity to capitalize on its diversity, but its educators must first view this diversity as an asset. Through training, educators can restructure their attitudes and methodologies to better interact with and motivate both minority and non-minority students. A 21-item bibliography is included. (Author/DB)

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CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND ITS EFFECT ON EDUCATION

A paper submitted for the COABE conference in Buffalo, New York in 1990

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ABSTRACT

Though the existence of a culturally pluralistic society has long been recognized in the United States, demographic trends will force new attitudes toward coping with a larger minority school population. Unless American educators prepare to understand culturally pluralistic student bodies, the result will be an economy dependent on an under-educated or miseducated work force.

America has a unique opportunity to capitalize on its diversity, but its educators must first view this diversity as an asset. Through training, educators can restructure their attitudes and methodologies to better interact with and motivate both minority and non-minority students.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND ITS EFFECT ON EDUCATION

Kamal Nimer, Ph.D.

Cultural diversity, a valuable and enriching quality for countries that have opened their doors for immigrants, appeared early in American history. Oscar Handlin (p. 3) remarked, "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America, I discovered that the immigrants were American history." Rose called the United States the "nation of nations", and Glazer described North American society as a "mosaic." Ethnic diversity has existed in America since colonial times and persists today.

Throughout the colonial period and until near the end of the nineteenth century, American cultural patterns were predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant (WASP). Ethnic differences -- as expressed in social behavior -- were not tolerated in most institutional settings. Minorities were forced to adapt to WASP culture in order to participate in the American mainstream.

Since the nineteenth century, when America accommodated a tremendous influx of new citizens, pluralism and tolerance became more integral characteristics of America. Hirsch (p. 95) pointed out: "We [Americans] believe that our diversity brings us a special strength and vitality." Glazer (p. 28) noted that pluralism "does not divide the

nation or weaken it; rather it helps integrate the immigrants of groups and adds a rich strand of variety to American civilization."

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the influx of immigrants had peaked. Those whose xenophobia would force assimiliation of immigrants embraced the "melting pot" concept as the ideal model for American development. Differences arising from diversity were subjugated to a homogenous citizenry. This model failed to become the reality in the United States.

Unfortunately, the melting pot theory is still widely accepted, especially by teachers. Bennett (p. 37) argued that, in an attempt to educate in "the American way," many teachers are blind to their students' personal and cultural strengths. These teachers view cultural differences as deficits and disadvantages. Early in the twentieth century Horace Kallen immigrated to the United States from Poland. Though he argued vehemently against enforced Americanization of immigrants, his views were not given much credence until after the United States' civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

The concept of cultural pluralism developed as an alternative to the melting pot theory and, in fact, more accurately mirrored American life. In a pluralistic

society, different groups are permitted to retain their mores and practices -- as long as these characteristics are not deemed a threat to the survival of the society.

There are several working definitions of culture which help us to appreciate the enriching benefits of diversity. Some, like Abrahams (p. 31), define the culture of a people as that which includes all of the systems, techniques, and standards which make up their way of life. Shade (p. 16) views culture as representing a group's preferred way of perceiving, judging, and organizing the ideas, situations, and events they encounter in daily life, in other words, the standards and definitions used by members of a human community to organize their experiences. Taylor defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Bennett, p. 6).

Cultures differ in the specific activities which they encourage and value. Schools should take a pro-active role in promoting cultural training, helping the learner to make sound judgments about the causes of others' behavior. To be successful, cultural training must teach the valued as well as the unacceptable behaviors from the examined culture.

For instance, Brislin (p. 68) points out that time, in many cultures, is less differentiated than in more modern ones. "What time should we come to dinner?" asks the American. "Anytime," answers the Greek villager. This exchange may lead to honest misunderstanding. To Americans, "anytime" frequently is a polite non-invitation, but the Greek villager literally means the American will be welcome anytime. The villager believes limiting when a guest may come would insult the visitor.

Brislin (p. 67) noted that some Americans find Greeks "extremely rude." Americans conclude this from observations of Greeks in public settings. These observers fail to realize that many Greeks have an ingroup social behavior: another with an outgroup. With family or friends, for instance, Greeks tend to be extremely polite. With outgroups, however, they are "rude." A foreigner seeing only the outgroup social behavior may assume Greeks are rude.

The amplitude of a response can differ between cultures. In one culture, verbal exchange may be very loud, the loudness reflecting no more than merely lively discussion. Members of another culture, however, may interpret an increase in volume as signaling anger or aggression.

These are but a few instances of cultural misunderstandings. Bennett (p. 160) contended that the curriculum in most American schools is a classic example of institutional and cultural racism. From elementary school, where uncounted numbers of children have been taught to sit "like an Indian" (and have accepted the stereotype), to colleges and universities, where thousands more have learned the misconception that IQ differences are caused by race, schools have fostered a belief in white supremacy. School texts and educational media have presented negative myths and stereotypes about most ethnic minorities. A distorted view of history reinforces the doctrine of white supremacy.

Many textbooks contain erroneous or dated information about Africa. As a result, misconceptions about African-Americans are perpetuated (some believed by African-Americans themselves, as they are often no less vulnerable than majority students). According to the president of the Council of Interracial Books for Children: "Racism in textbooks is usually most evident in five important areas: the historical perspective from which the material is presented: the characterization of Third World peoples: the manner in which their customs and traditions are depicted: the terminology used to describe the peoples and their culture and the type of language ascribed to them: and the nature of the illustrations. (Bennett, p. 165)

Bennett (p. 168) pointed out that all non-white ethnic groups in America are affected by racism. Moreover, many immigrants, such as Irish, Italians, Muslims and Croatians, have experienced discrimination.

By standing against racism, through encouraging tolerance and fairness, schools fulfill vital functions of American education which ideally strives for unity.

> "O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other, not that you may dispute with each other...."
>
> Glorious Quran 13:49

Schools should provide orientation sessions for teachers to familiarize them with various cultures. For example, teachers should know that many African-American students have learning-style preferences that place them at a disadvantage in American public schools. Silence and sitting still often are signs that the African-American child is bored. But the typical macrocultural mode is for the teacher to talk and for the students to listen. Students are frequently expected to sit quietly as passive "recipients" of knowledge.

According to Bennett (p.23), research indicates that teachers do over 75% of the talking in the average

classroom. The cardinal rule is that students must raise their hands and may not speak until given permission. One must never interrupt another who is speaking, especially the teacher. This mode may clash with the culture of students who learn best in a more informal setting that encourages an active interchange between speaker and audience. African-American students often learn best in settings that encourage a simultaneous response of thought, feeling and movement. Teachers may find it necessary to experiment with various strategies to mesh effectively with the different cognitive styles of students.

The macroculture emphasizes visual learning through the written word. In Euro-American tradition it is commonly accepted that the highest levels of thinking are possible only for humans who can reflect upon written thoughts. In contrast, many African-Americans and peoples from Asian and Arab cultures have been raised in cultures heavily influenced by oral traditions. Though many African cultures once had written traditions, much has been lost. Thus, the cultures of this continent have become better known for elaborate communication systems expressed in storytelling, drumming, singing, or rituals involving dance. Bennett (p. 24) pointed out that since Africans arrived in the United States as captives, music and the spoken word have been at

the heart of preserving and recording their cultural experience.

Classroom examples of the oral/aural tradition are easily illustrated. One teacher discovered that her African-American students scored considerably higher on tests when she read aloud the questions provided in written form. Another found that African-Americans' comprehension of a U.S. history test was better if they listened to a tape of the text while reading it. Many of her European-American pupils preferred to read without hearing the tape. While students must acquire the skills necessary to compete in mainstream America, it is equally important that the impact of culture on learning be recognized as a key to improved student achievement and enhanced self-esteem.

The use of body language also can exacerbate cultural distinctions. African-Americans are more likely to touch each other during conversation than European-Americans. Messages are sent between individuals or groups through hand gestures, body stances, styles of walking, as well as hairstyles or attire. (Shade, p. 24)

Shade underscores differences in communication skills with an important observation. While European-American and African-American listeners tend to spend the same amount of time gazing at a speaker's face, the timing and sequence of

gazing varies considerably. (Shade, p. 293) In addition, African-American parents sometimes teach their children that "looking (an adult) in the eye" is a sign of disrespect. In contrast, European-American children are socialized to do just the opposite -- looking away from the speaker is deemed disrespectful. African-Americans themselves are not a homogeneous group and, therefore, some students can move between the differing modes of communication with ease. Research has indicated that African-Americans and European-Americans not only behave differently at non-verbal levels but may interpret non-verbal behavior differently.

Goldberg and Mayerberg investigated reactions of elementary school children to a teacher. African-American and European-American second and sixth graders evaluated a European-American female teacher who taught a lesson while displaying either positive, neutral, or negative affective non-verbal behavior. Although European-American pupils in both grades rated the "positive" teacher more favorably, only the sixth grade African-American students did so. African-American second graders, on the other hand, rated the "neutral" teacher most favorably, thereby suggesting that there are cultural differences in decoding non-verbal behavior at certain ages. (Shade, p. 294)

Studies conducted among Native American students provide further examples demonstrating that teachers'

effectiveness may be diminished if they are not familiar with their students' customs and habits. One report pointed out that many American Indians are still taught to respect elders and teachers, and thus not to speak unless spoken to. These children are caught in a dilemma when they are expected to raise their hands and participate in lengthy class discussions. (p.15)

Others noted that Indian children often show their respect for adults by avoiding eye contact with elders and responding to questions only after an appropriate pause. Some Indian parents worry that this behavior is misinterpreted as shyness -- and that their children are often ignored in a classroom where the teacher expects them to behave like white, middle-class students.

Studies in multicultural schools show that student performance may be directly and indirectly related to culturally-based learning styles. Increased emphasis on the development of flexible teaching strategies may lead to higher levels of student achievement. Teachers must be trained to recognize and adapt more readily to differences in communication styles, to better decode nonverbal behavior, and to promote cross-cultural understanding within the multicultural setting.

Today minorities comprise over 65 percent of the student population in the metropolitan schools of the United States. Lack of adequate performance by significant numbers of these groups could cripple the U.S. economy. It has been noted that the future of this country is highly dependent upon the skills of today's youth, one third of whom are minorities. (Shade, p.3)

Ethnic groups provide a sense of belonging which can make their members better able to cope with society than they could as individuals. Unless a child learns about the forces which shaped him, the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being. The lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience should reinforce and contribute to the positive image he has of himself. Schools should view the minority student's previous cultural and linguistic experiences as valuable foundations upon which to build.

As part of their essential professional knowledge, teachers should become familiar with key features of the cultural systems of major ethnic groups here in the United States. Such differences, as they arise, present instructional opportunities to infuse classroom life with cross-cultural perspectives. Students in multicultural settings need to be encouraged to bring some of their

out-of-school experiences into class to share and discuss with their peers.

Ethnic minority groups in fact have been demanding that education respect their religious and cultural beliefs so that their children will not be required to act contrary to those beliefs. In the United Kingdom, for example, Bradford was renown for its provisions for minorities, particularly in education. The guidelines regarding the education of pupils from minority groups were based on two fundamental beliefs. The first was that each section of city's community had an an equal right to its distinctive identity and loyalty to its culture, language, religion, and custom. The second was that each child in Bradford was entitled to equality of treatment.

Bradford adopted a more cautious approach to the special needs of minority pupils. Some of these, such as the provision of halal meat in schools for Muslim pupils, were approved. Others were based on established practices in some schools. These rules for children included: permitted absence from school during religious festivals: instruction in their own religion during school hours: prayer at a specified time; a dress code mandated by Islam instead of school uniforms. Other provisions were not prescriptive, but merely advised teachers to exercise tact and sensitivity when dealing with topics some Muslims have

found to be offensive, such as in sex education or fund-raising involving lotteries or gambling. (Halstead, p.29) Parents were even granted the right to withdraw their children from certain classes, such as coeducational swimming.

Single-sex schooling, particularly for girls of secondary school age, has been one of the most sustained demands of the Muslims in Bradford. Some Muslim parents have been prepared to keep their daughters away from school altogether, or send them back to Pakistan, rather than allow them to attend coeducational schools.

The more a teacher knows about various ethnic groups and the most successful teaching methods for each group, the more he will succeed in teaching. Shade (p.332) argued that African-American children can quickly read faces, recognize people and situations, and memorize correctly in a short time the words to songs they hear on the radio. This does little to help them acquire the abstract and more object-oriented information presented by teachers and texts. African-American children are more likely to remember ideas and concepts with which they have interacted, touched and discussed rather than through lecturing, note-taking, underlining and other relatively passive activities. Therefore, teachers should recognize the importance of

providing active experiences and field trips related to course content where students may "learn by doing".

Educators need to develop deeper insight into society's core culture and the way it shapes our schools. Many students have felt alienated in school because they experienced conflict between cultural expectations at home and at school. Further, the use of the IQ tests in the United States has led to over-representation of the poor and non-white in the "educable mentally handicapped" classifications, with 85% of the children placed in special education being poor and/or non-white. (Gupta, p.39)

Over-representation of children from ethnic minority groups in special education also has been observed in Britain. Gupta pointed out that in 1970, while ordinary schools held only 17% immigrant children, 34% of the students in special schools for the educationally subnormal were from immigrant families. The results of an investigation in a Midland town in England in 1984 furnished further evidence that children from West Indian and Indian backgrounds are over-represented in remedial classes compared to their white peers. (p.2) Similar disparity has been found in the state of New Jersey, where 43% of African-American were categorized as Educably Mentally Retarded (EMR) whle constituting only 17.8% of the public school population. Comparably, 13.3% of Hispanic children

were labelled EMR while constituting only 7.4% of the school population. (p.3)

Referral of a child for special education is an important part of the procedure but not the sole basis for such placement. The real placement determinant is assessment results. If the assessment procedure is biased, the probability of an incorrect placement is high. Thus, traditional assessment procedures, the IQ test in particular, have become a focus of criticism. Gupta argued that the majority of the existing IQ tests have been designed and standardized for Western-type populations. Therefore, these tests should not be used to make crucial decisions about children -- even those living in Western countries -- whose previous experiences and culture differ substantially from the dominant culture.

In California, the indictment against the testing procedure due to racial, ethnic, and cultural bias has led to the involvement of the judicial system. Gupta noted that the findings of the judiciary appear to confirm evidence of discriminatory practices in the assessment of African-American children. Cases of horrendously unethical use of tests on children whose dialects or languages differed from the "norm" resulted in low scores and subsequent low placement. Gupta pointed out that the growing concern with the use of IQ tests in general, and

specifically on children from diverse cultural backgrounds, has inspired alternative forms of assessment to mitigate against bias in testing procedures. (p.7) Because traditional tests inaccurately measure a child's abilities or intelligence if that child does not have the same linguistic experience or cultural background as the dominant target testing population, such testing is no longer in use in parts of the United States. (Vernon: p.304)

Studies have shown that low IQ scores can be raised by changes in the test taker's environment. Vernon pointed out that African-American children whose families had migrated from the South to New York or Philadelphia obtained higher average IQs the longer their period of residence in the Northern cities. (p. 289) This issue raises other questions, such as cultural assimilation. Do the results of the studies presume the dominant culture is in some way better because its children score higher on tests designed for them? And, subsequently, should African-American parents seek to change their environment, which includes values and traditions, merely to seek improvement in the scores of their children?

One could argue that the price for refusal to consciously pursue environmental engineering is lesser educational opportunity for minority students as a result of inaccurate testing and placement. However, if

European-American children were in the minority, one suspects that their parents would object to having their children measured by tests with which they were unfamiliar due to cultural ignorance or lack of exposure.

Experiments have confirmed the dependence of reading skills on cultural literacy. The Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois paired two groups of readers. Each group was similar in composition: male to female ratio, educational background, age, social class, etc. The only difference between the two groups was that one was in India; the other in the United States. Both were given the same two letters to read. However, one letter described an Indian wedding and the other an American. The reading performance of the two groups split along lines of nationality. The Indians performed well in reading about the Indian wedding but poorly in reading about the American one: the Americans vice versa. (pp. 17-18)

It is through language that ethnic groups develop a sense of identity and transmit cultural values to the next generation.

Houlton argues that ESL teachers actually perform more than a language teaching function: they help to socialize the child to the norms, values, and cultural system of the school and society. If this instruction occurs without

careful regard to the cultural being of the child, his value system and code of behavior, the results can be detrimental. Such instruction can serve to confuse the child's self-image and devalue those aspects of life which he or she associates distinctly with the home. (p.25) Teachers should be counseled to understand that no child should be expected to cast off entirely the culture or language of the home upon entering school.

Language and society have co-existed since the beginning of human civilization. Sapir noted that one's perception of the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built upon language. Hirsch argued that a nation's language can be regarded as a part of its culture, or conversely, its culture can be regarded as the totality of its language. (p. 83) Language is one of the strongest bonds uniting an ethnic group: it is an important cultural factor and a symbolic ethnic marker which affects the assimilation process.

Bennett argued that language is one of the great barriers to cultural pluralism in American society and to empathy and respect among culturally different peoples. , (p.196) In the United States, according to the 1980 census, 11% of Americans are from non-English speaking homes.

English literacy plays a critical role in the adjustment of immigrant, refugee, and other minority children. The school is often the primary social institution responsible for mainstreaming minorities. Yet, some school administrators, teachers, psychologists and educational researchers have paid scant attention to cultural factors in determining the academic achievement and long-term psychological adjustment of minority students. It is evident that there is a significant relationship between cultural congruence in instructional practice and childrens' progress. (Shade, p.50)

It is expected that the enrollment of linguistically different minority children will increase significantly in the next ten years. By the year 2000, European-American children will make up only 57% of the American school population. One out of every third child in the United States will be a member of a minority group. (Shade, p.50)

In Race, Prejudice, and Discrimination. Rose pointed out that all immigrants must go through "adjustment levels." He observed: "It is evident that no specific form of culture can be transplanted from one environment to the other without more or less radical change ... the migrating group will have to readjust to the new environment." (p.383) The acquisition of language skills is not only the most important device for adjustment, but for survival.

Newcomers must learn to use the new language to find their way in society.

Teachers must be relatively free of racial prejudice and ethnocentrism if they are to be effective communicators in a multi-cultural classroom. Unfortunately, teachers appear to be more positive with students of their own race. To examine teachers' nonverbal behavior, Shade (p.297) made secret videotapes of teachers while they were verbally praising their students. "Right, that's good," was a customary response when a student answered correctly. However, the judges viewing the tapes agreed the results clearly showed the race of a student influenced a teacher's facial expressions. Both European-American and African-American teachers showed more pleasant, positive facial expressions when praising a student of the teacher's corresponding race -- even when the identical performance came from a student of a race different from the teacher's own.

It is a challenge to find out how learners can be taught when teachers do not understand their language, and misinterpret their behavior. Most teachers expect cultural differences when meeting students from other countries. Fewer of them are aware that cultural differences can also occur between members of the ethnic groups of the same

society. Bennett (p.26) pointed out that even in the 1980s most American schools remained monocultural.

CASE STUDY:
THREE ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

Each case study complements the other, while retaining distinguishing features. They deal with an ethnic population distinct from the majority population in a number of areas: language, religion, social structure and other cultural aspects.

The first obvious characteristic of this group is religious identity. In general, its members continue to stress Islamic values and traditions. The second distinguishing characteristic is language. Over half of this group uses the Arabic language at home. Prominent features of this group are related to family structure. Kinship ties persist strongly among members of the Muslim community.

McMillen mentioned that there are 46 million students in U.S. schools and 2.7 million teachers. Among them, 5.4 million students attend private schools with 377,000 educators (p.7). Khalil pointed out that there are 50 full-time Islamic schools serving about 5,000 students, and approximately 370 part-time weekend and supplementary schools and educational programs distributed among over

1,000 mosques and Islamic centers, serving about 40,000 students (p.40). Unfortunately, this is far less than what six million Muslims in America need.

Three full-time Islamic schools are among the most successful Islamic schools on the East Coast. They are: the Islamic Saudi Academy in Washington, D.C., the Islamic Academy in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Al-Ghazali Academy in Jersey City, New Jersey.

The Islamic Saudi Academy (ISA) opened in 1984 as a Saudi institution, funded and supervised by the government of Saudi Arabia. It was designed to educate the sons and daughters of Saudi nationals, members of the Arab and Muslim communities, and others residing in the Washington area.

Its educational environment is accordance with the principles of Islam which fosters academic achievement and prepares the student for constructive role in society. The curriculum includes Arabic and Islamic studies (in Arabic) as well as the Fairfax County school curriculum, along with English and Arabic second language programs.

Study at the Academy consists of four levels: kindergarten, elementary, junior high and high school. At the same campus, there are two separate schools, one for boys and the other for girls. Co-education is limited to kindergarten through second grade. Over 850 students are

enrolled at the Academy, representing 20 nationalities. American-born students constitute about a third of the total student body. American teachers comprise 65% of the Academy's faculty, and American staff members comprise 40% of the staff.

Al-Ghazali Academy was established in 1984 in the Islamic Center of Jersey City in New Jersey. It began with six grades, six teachers amd 51 students. Now it has 10 grades, 18 qualified teachers, and 298 students. It follows the American public school curriculum in addition to its Arabic language and Islamic studies programs. Thirty percent of the administrators are volunteers, the rest have honorarium salaries. The school has an active board of trustees, a valuable library, a good laboratory and a mosque where students perform daily prayers.

The Islamic Academy was established in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1978 as a supplementary school having sessions on Saturdays, Sundays and Tuesday evenings, plus intensive courses in Arabic and Islamic studies during the summer. In 1984, it became a full-time school. It has eight grades, with 11 teachers and 120 students. It serves students from Ann Arbor and the surrounding vicinity. Like the other two Islamic schools, it has a mosque for prayer.

These schools were established for the same basic reason. In the words of one administrator: "We know that we cannot expect education in the American schools to reinforce the values, beliefs and cultural identity which each child brings to the school. Muslim students attending public schools are expected to cope with two cultures, the non-Islamic and the Islamic. Students are certain to experience conflict between what they have been taught at home and what they learn in school. Many experience considerable difficulty maintaining strong Islamic values throughout their years of schooling here in the United States." Another administrator explained it thus: "Some believe in the dictum, 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do. But we Muslims can't do that in a society suffering from severe and pervasive problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse and sex outside of marriage, which are forbidden in Islam. On the contrary, our role must be to save our children from such problems. Education is the best way to protect our families and others from such severe problems ."

During an interview, one parent said, "We, as an ethnic community in a pluralistic society, should not expect to remain untouched and unchanged by the presence of other ethnic groups. The ethnic minority communities will not in practice preserve all elements of their cultures and lifestyles intact. However, we can limit this process of

Americanization, particularly when it clearly contradicts our cultural values, by sending our children to Islamic schools. At the same time, teaching in such schools should aim to educate all children to an understanding of the shared values of the pluralistic society here in the United States. As educators, we should strive to meet the individual educational needs of all pupils. By doing so, such a school can serve both the Muslim community and community culture at large."

"We Muslims have cultural diversity within our community. This is something natural," said another parent. "We do not expect the school to be an exact copy of any cultural group."

Though the majority of students in these three schools are Muslims, we should expect differences in culture and background throughout the student body and staff.

One teacher assumed a student's mother should help her with her homework. The teacher was annoyed that the mother "ignored" her repeated requests for the mother to help her daughter. Soon, the teacher discovered that the mother did not know the English language. She had just arrived from Saudi Arabia and had seven other children at home.

In another class, when a student sneezed, he said (in Arabic) "Praise Allah!" In response, his neighbor said,

"Allah bless you!" The teacher, from a different culture, noticed boys talking in a language she did not understand. She ordered them to be quiet. Astonished, the boys looked at each other and laughed. Thinking their behavior inappropriate, the teacher sent both students to the principal. Later, the principal apologized to the teacher for the school's omission in not providing adequate orientation for its new non-Muslim staff.

During a discussion about cultural diversity and its effect on education, a principal said: "More subtle difficulties arise when an individual from another culture expects respect to be shown him because of his age, profession or other status, and expects this respect to be manifested in soft, polite, hesitant speech. This is what many of our own staff who come from the East expect. They complain that some students from a different culture go so far as to call them by first name."

Loneliness is a problem that some students, especially females, suffer here. In their home countries, they spent time with friends and relatives in the evenings and on weekends. They enjoyed frequent social and religious gatherings. Once in the United States, they can't talk to their neighbors; they have no relatives nearby. They often feel isolated -- even in an Islamic school, where a local dialect may initially be the object of ridicule.

From gestures which have an innocent meaning in one culture but which represent an insult in another, to the celebration of holidays which are non-existent in Muslim or foreign cultures, the distinct strands of a pluralistic society becomes magnified in educational settings. Teachers often regard a student's failure to conform readily to the dominant cultural behavior pattern as an affront to their authority. The effort to aid in the recognition of cultural differences is not aimed at excusing inappropriate behavior. The goal of effective implementation of cultural training is to provide a forum for mutual respect.

The changing configuration of the world's cultural and political boundaries will place greater stress on those educational systems which cannot incorporate diversity. America has a unique opportunity to capitalize on its cultural strengths drawn from the varied backgrounds of its past and continuing immigrations. Schools like the three Muslim schools cited here will likely continue to exist to meet the specific needs of Muslim students. Their existence should not be viewed as a failure, but as a testament to the increasing acceptance and recognition of their contribution to a pluralistic society.

Today's challenge is to fashion an educational system in which all cultures are welcomed and none despised. This can only be accomplished when the political will exists to

expend time and resources. The irony is that the least expensive component of such will is the most important. Without the desire to understand the dynamics of other cultures. attempts at fashioning such a system will be no more than an ill-conceived maintenance of the educational status quo.

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